

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are the only figures directly representing citizens at an EU institution as deputies elected in general elections. This is why they should be particularly responsible for contact with the citizens of Europe. Currently, amongst the ever growing methods of communication are various Internet tools. Do the Members of the European Parliament use them willingly? What kind of actions do they take in this regard?

European politics online. The case of the Polish Members of European Parliament is a publication summarising the Internet activities of the Polish MEPs and their use of Internet tools for communication with the citizens in the first half of the European Parliament's seventh term. The authors analysed MEPs' websites, their Facebook fanpages, blogs and Twitter accounts. They also tried to assess whether MEPs devote their Internet activities to subjects concerning the European Union or rather to internal Polish affairs.

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EUROPEAN POLITICS ONLINE

THE CASE OF THE POLISH MEMBERS OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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The first part of the paper discusses the importance of understanding the underlying structure of the data. This is particularly relevant in the context of machine learning, where the ability to identify patterns and relationships in the data is crucial for making accurate predictions. The second part of the paper focuses on the development of a new algorithm for solving the problem of finding the optimal solution to a given set of constraints. This algorithm is based on a combination of linear programming and heuristic search techniques, and is designed to be both efficient and effective. The third part of the paper presents the results of a series of experiments conducted to evaluate the performance of the proposed algorithm. These results show that the algorithm is able to find the optimal solution to the problem in a significantly shorter time than previous methods. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for future research in the field of optimization.

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**Europe for Citizens
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During these times of crisis, citizens have a multitude of questions concerning the future of the European Union, how it is working and the changes it faces. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are the only figures directly representing the citizens at EU institutions as deputies elected in general elections. In addition, the importance of the European Parliament has grown significantly after the Lisbon Treaty's enactment as it now co-decides issues related to a number of European policy areas. This is why MEPs should play the role of a link, an interface joining the EU and the citizens, and their communications should focus mainly on European issues as this is what they should be mainly involved with.

Amongst the ever growing methods of communication are various Internet tools. The social media, communication by e-mail or Internet sites represent sources of information that citizens willingly use. A message published online has a chance to reach the younger generation, a group currently not interested in politics, but which will soon decide about the future of Europe. The Web is also a means to reach other media through which information may get to a broader audience. It provides a unique opportunity to enter into a dialogue with the recipient of the message and to receive feedback. The Internet is also the only medium not dependent on the place of residence and the distance dividing a politician from his or her voters, which is particularly important for Members of the European Parliament.

In the middle of the current term of the European Parliament, the Institute of Public Affairs has examined **whether and how Polish MEPs use on-line communication**. We have analysed **what tools they use, whether they use them interactively** and whether their activity evokes a response from the citizens. We have also examined **whether they focus in their communication on domestic or European issues**.

The study, carried out between September and December 2011 on a group of all the 50¹ Polish Members of European Parliament, consisted of the following elements:

- A questionnaire sent to the MEPs (34 MEPs responded) preceded by a pilot project (five interviews with MEPs' staff)
- A quantitative and a qualitative analysis of internet sites
- An analysis of Facebook (FanPage Trender tool)
- A quantitative analysis of blogs, microblogs and YouTube postings and channels
- The "Secret Citizen" study, where questions from potential citizens were posted via the Internet
- An analysis of 2 leading Polish web portals (a total of 400 articles containing the names of MEPs)

Political group	Number of Polish MEPs
European People's Party, EPP	29 (28 until Dec. 2011)
Socialists & Democrats, S&D	7
European Conservatives and Reformists, ECR	15 (until Dec. 2011) 11 (from Jan. 2012)
Europe of Freedom and Democracy, EFD	4 (from Jan. 2012)

Table 1.
Membership of Polish
MEPs in political groups²

1 This study was carried out in the autumn 2011, and so before the new Polish MEP Arkadiusz Bratkowski started his term in December 2011. His short presence in the EP exempts him from any comparison with the other MEPs in this study.

2 As a result of a rift in the Law and Justice Party (PiS) in the autumn of 2011, a grouping under the name of "Solidarna Polska" [Solidary Poland] and the MEPs who belong to it (and who, in fact initiated the split) left the ECR and at the end of December 2011 joined Europe of Freedom and Democracy, EFD, a group drawing Euro-sceptics. Since their communication activities analysed here took place when they were still members of the conservative group, in the study results we refer to their former membership in ECR, while mentioning the fact that they have since changed their group in the European Parliament.



The Internet offers politicians a number of tools they can use to engage with citizens and for political marketing. These include either some static applications (for instance, WWW sites) which to a lesser extent allow Internet users to become active, as well as some dynamic tools, which enable two-way communication (e.g., Facebook, Twitter).³

The analyses carried out indicate that Polish MEPs can be divided into two groups – those who believe in communication with the use of Internet tools and those who rarely use them. Half of the MEPs have a website and use at least two additional communication tools (text forms: a public account on Facebook, microblogging [e.g., Twitter], blogs, visual forms such as YouTube), and seven deputies use all the above-mentioned tools. As many as 12 MEPs, however, have only a website and do not use any tools that are more interactive or designed for direct dialogue.

Out of the group of 50 MEPs:

- 49 maintain their own website
- 29 provide their direct official e-mail address on their website⁴
- 28 use the YouTube service
- 21 have a fanpage on Facebook⁵
- 17 have an account at a microblogging service (Twitter or Blip)
- 17 keep a blog⁶.

InfoBox 1:
Use of Internet tools by
Polish Members of the
European Parliament

3 In order to analyse the activity of the Polish MEPs on the world wide web, the tools that have been chosen are those that are both most popular with the MEPs and the general public: WWW sites, Facebook, microblogs, blogs and YouTube. Since it was necessary to limit the scope of the study, we decided to carry out an in-depth analysis only of the MEPs' Facebook profiles and their websites (detailed site coding). As a result of this decision, only a quantitative comparison of data on Twitter and the blogs has been made. In the above-mentioned study of Facebook, only the public accounts of the MEPs have been considered (fanpages), primarily because they are freely accessible for external users who do not have a Facebook account.

4 The e-mail addresses of all MEPs within the PE domain are listed on the PE official website.

5 Apart from the public accounts of MEPs, there are also 25 private accounts (10 MEPs have both types of accounts, and 15 have only a private one). Thus, in total, only 14 Polish MEPs are not present in this network.

6 As of November 2011. In the subsequent weeks a few MEPs have further developed their Internet activity.

Polish MEPs as compared to the rest of the European Union

Polish MEPs are in line with the European trends, with **results slightly better than the average for all Members of the European Parliament**. As shown by the results of research carried out by the agency Fleishman-Hilard⁷ at the turn of 2010 and 2011, out of the total of 736 MEPs, 87% had their own websites (the current Polish result – 98%), 28.5% kept a blog (the current Polish result – 34%), and 44.5% used YouTube (the current Polish result – 56%). Polish MEPs are as eager as other European politicians to use microblogging – for both groups the average is 34%.

Compared to Europe as a whole, **Polish MEPs also look relatively good in the analysis of Facebook accounts**. In comparison to the deputies representing states where the service is more popular than in Poland (i.e., where there is a greater number of users), Polish parliamentarians take second place with respect to the average number of fans and place third in the category of fanpage percentage in the national representation. Even though the Polish result may have been overstated because of the exceptionally high results of Jerzy Buzek, it should be noted that other Member States also have individual MEPs who stand out by being much more popular than the average.

Table 2.
Fanpages of Members
of European Parliament
in selected EU Member
States⁷

Source: Authors' compilation based on data from <http://www.socialbakers.com> and Facebook

Member State	Average number of fans	Fanpage percentage in national representation	Fanpages number	Total number of Facebook users in the country (in millions of people)
Italy	4604	50.7%	37	20.8
Poland	3040	42.0%	21	7.8*
France	2879	48.6%	36	23.5
United Kingdom	1749	19.7%	14	30.4
Spain	512	13.0%	7	15.7
Germany	464	36.4%	36	22.1

*Data from the site <http://www.socialbakers.com> give the number of the so called *real* users (people who use the network but do not necessarily have their own account there). The Polish result is 20% of the total population, 35% of the population of Internet users.

7 The survey was carried out on a sample of 120 MEPs and not on the total population. For the full documentation of the survey – see <http://www.epdigitaltrends.eu>.

8 Data from: <http://www.facebook.com/europeanparliament> [access: 7 February 2012]. A sudden increase of the number of fans on the fanpage of Martin Schulz noted after he started his term as the President of the EP, resulted in Germany swapping places with Spain.

General assessment of the activity of MEPs on the Internet – Internet Activity Indicator

For the purposes of the study under discussion, an indicator comprehensively illustrating the communication activity of the Polish MEPs on the Internet has been developed.⁹ The **Internet Activity Indicator (IAI)** covers the **use of all Internet communication tools**, focusing primarily on the **frequency of their use** rather than on merely having a registered account. Since the main task of the study was to analyse Internet communication, without regards to other types of communication, the IAI cannot be treated as an element of assessing all communication of MEPs and their general activity in Europe. Such activity includes a number of other elements (for example, active participation in committee work or preparation of reports),¹⁰ and other forms of communication as opposed to those conducted online, for instance, personal meetings with members of the public.

In the IAI comparison, MEPs could obtain a maximum of 18.5 points. Points were awarded for frequency of using each of the tools under analysis. The highest result (11.5) was achieved by a representative of the conservative group, Paweł Kowal. It can be noticed that this figure is still far from the maximum, leaving much room for activity.

The acquired data (IAI) show a clear **division of MEPs into those who actively use a number of tools and those who do so only occasionally** and this is **a trend that does not depend on the age of an MEP or on the political group** to which he or she belongs. The average IAI for all MEPs is 4.1, so it is relatively low and shows that there is a great number of MEPs who are not active. The result of the representatives of the group Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) is particularly unsatisfactory, and they hold, proportionately, the lowest places in the ranking.

⁹ The methodology of developing this indicator is described in the publication *Europoseł w sieci* [pl], A. Łada, M. Fałkowska-Warska, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2012

¹⁰ For more on this subject – see *Nie tylko polityka zagraniczna. Polacy w Parlamencie Europejskim na półmetku 7. kadencji*, eds. M. Szczepanik, J. Kucharczyk, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2012

InfoBox 2:
Frequency of using
Internet tools by Polish
MEPs¹¹

News on the website: three MEPs update their websites every day or more frequently, 29 do so a few times a week, seven a few times a month, six even less frequently than a few times per month, and there is no data available for four MEPs.

Fanpages on Facebook: four MEPs update their status daily, ten do so a few times a week, one does so a few times a month, a six update their status less than a few times per month

Twitter: three MEPs tweet every day, seven do it a few times a month; three do it a few times a month, and three less than a few times per month

Blogs: six MEPs post a new entry a few times a week or more frequently, one does so once a week, five post a few times a month, five do so once a month or less (but at least once in 2011)

11. A survey carried out in autumn 2011 for the period covering September and October 2011.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE USE OF INTERNET TOOLS BY POLISH MEPS



Strengths

Universality and high frequency of updating websites

Nowadays maintaining a website is a minimum prerequisite for almost every public figure. It also plays the role of the centre of Internet activity, with which one can not only create coherent and effective communication, but can also gather a community of interested Internet users. The tools placed on the website (forums, on-line chats, the possibility to add comments, newsletters, films) and links to sites related to other activities of the MEP on the Internet (for instance, information about his or her account on Twitter) and other elements enabling Internet users to be active (for example, Facebook's "like" button), may forge stronger ties between voters and the politician.

All Polish MEPs – apart from Joanna Senyszyn (S&D) – have their own websites and a "News" tab, however, they differ in their updating frequency. The survey carried out between September and October 2011 showed that almost two thirds of the MEPs (32) update their websites at least a few times a week. This is a rather good result – a website is the most general Internet tool, addressed to a very broad audience - an electronic business card of an MEP, in fact. The result shows that **there is a great potential for Internet activity among the MEPs.**

Engaging blogs

The blogs written by the MEPs deserve attention and generally a positive assessment. Some blogs receive even several hundred comments under each entry (the ones that are particularly worth noting are those of Janusz Wojciechowski [ECR] and Joanna Senyszyn [S&D]). The MEPS using this form of communication are generally competent: they write relatively often and engagingly, although unfortunately not always on subjects

related to the EU (they get a greater response level to issues related to Polish politics). It is, however, possible to find a number of entries with very high content quality, and with a lively discussion between Internet users under blog entries with contributions from the MEPs themselves.

High level of technical cohesion of the communication and linkages between tools

Most MEPs realise the necessity to have coherent and integrated on-line communication. The MEPs who use specific tools make information concerning themselves available on their other sites, although some unprofessional behaviour does happen, such as, for instance, placing links on websites to private Facebook accounts.

The most advertised tool is the blog – 16 out of 17 bloggers place information about them on their websites. Blogging is a tool which – apart from a website – requires relatively more work from its author and probably that is why MEPs tend to advertise it – having put so much energy in creating it, they want it to be visible and read.

High level of party and group identification

Polish MEPs are usually loyal to the party which has enabled them to win their seat and are often eager to direct their website users to the site of their party. A similar trend can be noticed with respect to placing links to political groups in the European Parliament. Polish MEPs are slightly more willing to identify themselves with their European groups than with the parties back home, which is commendable, since as Members of the European Parliament they should primarily emphasise their European affiliation.

High level of awareness among MEPs of the importance of online communication

At the level of declarations (interviews, questionnaires) MEPs seem to be convinced that Internet communication is now a necessity and a future that cannot be escaped. However, this is not in contradiction with some critical opinions concerning its effectiveness (see below).

Weaknesses

Low interactivity of websites

The key factor of the effective creation of an Internet community around a WWW site is the encouragement to interact and get involved. Behind the high level of interactivity of a given website there is a number of technical solutions, for instance, the possibility to comment on an MEP's texts, on-line events or the possibility to make the content available on social networks. Only ten of the sites under study contained any information about online events (such as chats or webinars¹²). Only seven MEPs make it possible to comment on the content placed on their websites, the remainder of Polish MEPs under study have blocked that option. Relatively few MEPs make it possible for Internet users to disseminate the content of their sites by supplying buttons linking them to social network sites – such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, or sites such as reddit.com or digg.com. Giving access to a function allowing readers to share the content they have read is very important as it makes it possible for Internet users to promote the particular MEP among wider audiences. It should then be important for politicians to make such actions possible, although one should remember that texts with serious content are difficult to promote with these types of tools. Only few MEPs use these functions: only seven of them make a reference to Facebook (the “Like” button), five to Twitter (the “tweet” option), and only one MEP to Google+ (“+1”). In total, eight MEPs make it possible for Internet users to copy easily all the content published on their sites to other websites.

Rare use of additional tools for involving e-communities on a website

Polish MEPs commonly use the function enabling printing of articles, downloading them in .pdf format or sending them on via e-mail – the respective buttons are often found under the text of news or blog entries. Much more rarely do they publish materials more advanced from the point of view of graphic design or marketing. About a dozen (14) regularly present their professional activities in the form of a calendar but very

¹² Seminars held on the Internet in which participants can actively take part (for instance by asking questions).

few update it “forward” so that people interested in meeting the MEP in person could actually do that. Sixteen MEPs make it possible for Internet users to subscribe to the newsletter they send out.

Visually unattractive websites

The only graphic elements commonly used on MEPs’ websites are photographs and in most cases they constitute the only graphic or visual items. More advanced technologies (video, infographics or animation) are used much less frequently (e.g., only five MEPs use animations). Visually attractive elements on a website are more commonly used by MEPs from the younger age-groups – graphical elements can be found on the websites of seven (63%) out of the 11 MEPs in the youngest age-group (30-39 years of age).

Low level of professionalism on Facebook

The average number of fans of Polish MEPs is slightly more than three thousand, which, in absolute numbers, is not a very high result. The lonely winner here, significantly pushing this figure up, is Jerzy Buzek, with almost 44.5 thousand fans.¹³ **Only 8 MEPs have managed to attract more than one thousand fans.** Generally, however, the number of fans that Polish politicians have is not high: President Bronisław Komorowski has 20 thousand, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski, 7,300. When compared with the world leader in this category, Barack Obama (25 million fans), or the European leader, Nicolas Sarkozy (500 thousand fans), these numbers are not impressive. This partially results from the low level of interest in politics in Poland and the probable unwillingness of Internet users to express clear support for any specific political option without the option of anonymity. On the other hand, it is also a consequence of the lack of proper effort on the part of MEPs and the low level of professionalism in online communication. In the case of the Members of the European Parliament another factor is probably also the low level of interest in the work of this institution. There are some MEPs, however, who have managed to overcome this barrier – European leaders, apart from Jerzy Buzek, include Debora Serracchiani

13 All the data concerning Facebook come from December 31, 2011, unless indicated otherwise.

(Italy) with more than 60 thousand fans, Sonia Alfano (also Italy) with over 32 thousand fans and Marine Le Pen (France) with more than 21 thousand fans. Obviously a number of factors other than their Internet activities could have had impact on those numbers not only during their membership in the European Parliament.

The result of Jerzy Buzek – impressive in Polish conditions – should be analysed with some reservation, as at the time of the study this MEP represented the whole institution of the EP, which also meant that he had professional Internet service support, wider media response and broader interest of the general public.

In the case of Facebook, it is not just the number of fans that is important but their involvement. Here a key role is played by activity and the way in which the account is managed by the site administrator. The main activities of Internet users on the profiles of Polish MEPs are responsive. The more interesting entries appear on the site (photos, videos, competitions), the more often the fans respond. With the exception of a few MEPs (e.g., Wojciech Olejniczak, Rafał Trzaskowski) **Polish MEPs are rather passive users of the site**, who, to a great extent, are present on Facebook, but do not actively make use of the site and its various functions.

The varied activity of MEPs is the reason why the number of involved fans (clicking on the “Like” button, making comments or sharing their own material or views) also varies on their fanpages and has ranged (data from January 2012) from 1,990 to zero. It is interesting that low numbers have also been noted for sites liked by many Internet users – e.g., that of Tadeusz Zwiefka (second place among Polish MEPs in the number of fans, though it had only 47 active fans in January 2012, and two in November 2011). Comparing such profiles with the profiles of the most active MEPs (who also have many fans), confirms that in the case of Facebook, **the activity of the account owner is a particularly important factor and has direct impact on the activity of its users.**

That is why it is even more important to invest time and funds in this type of activity. In most cases, it is both the MEP and his office staff who are responsible for running the account. As the interviews and the questionnaires indicate, Internet communication activity is one of many responsibilities of the staff, who rarely have the proper qualifications and experience for effective online communication. An analysis of the

MEPs' profiles confirms the **low level of professionalism in handling their accounts** – in the case of the majority of fanpages, many activity options offered by Facebook (such as linking, competitions, surveys, status publication) are not used by MEPs.

The relatively low interactivity on the MEPs profiles and the infrequent use of Facebook options involving the fan community suggest that **Polish MEPs treat this tool rather as a form of marking their presence on the net rather than as an effective instrument for political marketing and engaging with voters.**

Advantage of traditional forms of communication over the Internet ones

Polish MEPs make themselves accessible using quite a few forms of communication, enabling various types of contact. As many as 47 MEPs use at least three forms of contact by e-mail and/or telephone.

- 48 MEPs publish the telephone number to their office in Poland on their website
- 42 MEPs publish the telephone number to their office abroad
- 29 MEPs publish their personal e-mail address
- 28 MEPs publish an office e-mail address
- 25 MEPs publish their assistant's e-mail address
- 19 MEPs publish a contact form on their site
- 1 MEP gives a Skype login

InfoBox 3:
Forms of contact made
available to the public by
Members of European
Parliament

And yet, electronic forms of contact lose when compared to the more traditional forms of communication – both with respect to the number of published contact details (almost all MEPs publish their phone number, less frequently their e-mail address) and their response to contact attempts.

Ignoring contact attempts by citizens

As the “Secret Citizen” survey shows, in many cases publishing the MEPs personal e-mail address or that of their assistant or office is merely a *pro forma* act and is just an empty declaration of willingness to engage in dialogue. The study consisted in checking whether the MEPs respond to questions concerning broadly understood European issues (for instance:

“What has been, in your opinion, the greatest success of the EU in recent years?”) asked through the electronic channels of communication that they have been made available (e-mail to the MEP, e-mail to the office, contact form on the website or on the Facebook fanpage). The purpose of the study was to determine whether it was possible for a citizen to communicate directly with an MEP.

The level of response by Polish MEPs to questions from the outside – from people who have nothing to do with the EU professionally or academically – must be assessed as unsatisfactory. Out of the 50 MEPs under analysis, only 13 gave any response at all, of which only nine people answered to the point.

What is striking, is the suspicion of MEPs (or their staff), who can be very inquisitive when dealing with those interested in the work or views of the MEP, about the reasons for their interest. The “Secret Citizen”, in response to a message sent, typically received a request for the reason for asking this particular question, the names of those who “commissioned” the question, the place where the MEP’s response would be published or even address information. The distrust of MEPs is even more intriguing as even after their curiosity was satisfied, they did not answer the questions.

Disregarding communication with EU citizens from outside Poland

In their communication efforts, Polish MEPs focus primarily on Polish citizens, neglecting the citizens of other countries whom they also represent. As representatives of an international institution, an English version of their website should be standard, yet fewer than half of Polish MEPs have a bilingual version of their website.

According to the MEPs themselves, their main target group are Polish citizens, and that is probably why they do not see the need to get more involved in communication in other languages. The assumption that it is not worth the effort to try to attract an audience from all over Europe is a controversial one. One must, however, admit that since Polish MEPs are not well known abroad, it is clearly not an easy task. What is more, the interest and support of citizens from countries other than Poland has little impact on the potential voters from the region, so the cost of such communication would be relatively high (time, translation, separate

communication strategy), whereas the effects would appear in some distant future. Some basic information about the MEP in English should, however, be something natural and an obvious requirement for them.

InfoBox 4:
Language versions
of websites of Polish
MEPs

20 MEPs have an English version of their website ¹⁴
9 MEPs publish information on their site in languages other than Polish or English
9 MEPs have a French version of their site
4 MEPs have a German version of their site
2 MEPs have a Ukrainian version of their site
2 MEPs have a Spanish version of their site
2 MEPs have an Italian version of their site
1 MEP has a Russian, Dutch and Czech version of his site

Unexpected and unmerited popularity of YouTube

It is worth noting that YouTube enjoys a greater popularity among MEPs than other web tools – as many as 28 Polish MEPs have their own channel to publish videos. This popularity is to some extent unmerited. As interviews with MEPs indicate, this tool is difficult to use for promotion of their own person and it is not very effective – especially in the case of an MEP's channel (it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the videos published on the site). As the viewing figures made available by YouTube indicate, the channels of MEPs are not very popular. The videos are viewed on average 300 times, whereas each new status update on Facebook is shown automatically to hundreds or thousands of fans, even if one publishes a very short message.

Out of all the online videos of the MEPs, the most popular are the ones where well-known actors can be seen. Viewers are attracted by the actors' names, and not by the names of the MEPs. Engaging celebrities was an effective marketing trick, attracting Internet users to the MEP's channel (e.g., 35,000 views of a video featuring one Polish actor).

14 Because of the necessity to limit the scope of the study, the content published in foreign languages has not been differentiated. It seems, however, that basic biographical information and contact details prevail.

Lack of belief in the effectiveness of online communication

Polish MEPS do not seem to believe in the effectiveness of their own online communications, nor do they believe that they are really achieving satisfactory results in this respect (*that is*: that someone really reads or views the published content). This seems to be the primary reason for the low level of professionalism among the MEPS in this field. This leads to a vicious circle: the MEPS claim that online communication is ineffective and that no one really uses it, so they generally neglect it, thus leading to a situation where indeed relatively few people take part in Internet dialogue with MEPS.

EUROPEAN ISSUES OR OUR OWN BACKYARD? THE SUBJECT MATTER OF MEPS' INTERNET COMMUNICATIONS



The role of the Members of the European Parliament is primarily to deal with European matters – these are the issues to which they should devote most of their attention both off and online. Obviously, this does not mean that they cannot deal with problems of their own country or the region from which they have been elected – in the public debate they should raise issues important for their country, though it is important to keep the right proportions. They should also point to the significance of the European Parliament.

Europe, but also sometimes a bit of Polish political fighting

In their own assessment of their communication, MEPs declare that the issues that prevail are those related with their activity in the European Parliament (94% of the surveyed MEPs). Less than half (41%) admit that they comment on Polish politics. The survey results confirmed that most MEPs indeed focus on European issues.

A general analysis of MEPs websites suggests that **the majority of the Members (33) devote the posts on their websites mainly to subjects concerning the European Union.** More than a dozen MEPs, however, concentrate on Polish affairs. This result is also confirmed by an analysis of individual posts on their sites. In almost three quarters of all texts (72%)¹⁵ the subjects raised were related to the EU itself, to Poland in the EU, to the European Commission, the European Parliament or non-EU countries. **When texts were devoted mainly to domestic affairs, the subjects were rarely related to the MEP's specialisation in the European Parliament.**

A relatively large number of texts dealt with the activity of MEPs in their regions and was aimed at disseminating knowledge about the EP (competitions, exhibition openings, meetings at schools, speeches at

¹⁵ For this purpose, the study analysed fifteen selected contents, published at different times from the website of every Polish MEP (total of 750 units).

conferences) and his or her activities in the Parliament itself (descriptions of the MEP's calendar for the coming week, parliamentary questions, meetings with the European Commission). In addition, typical comments on the current situation related to the MEP's role in the European parliament also appeared on the websites.

When writing about European issues, the MEPs mainly referred to the following topics: finance and the economy (26), foreign policy (16), social issues (15), regional policy and structural funds (14). As regards domestic issues, they focused on finance and the economy (8) and the political situation in Poland (5). In Polish regional affairs, education prevails (5).

MEPs who often mentioned Polish internal party affairs constitute a small but visible group. Eighteen MEPs placed content criticising other deputies or other Polish political parties on their websites (12 from ECR, three from EPP and three from S&D). In some cases, the MEPs (ECR and S&D) referred to Polish politics in their criticism – the website was clearly used to fight domestic political battles and not to engage in meaningful disputes with politicians from other ideological groups.

Main purpose of writing texts

Among the analysed texts, **the majority (40%) contained descriptions of the MEPs' activities, thus serving the purpose of self-presentation and promotion¹⁶.** More than one third of the entries were reports from the MEP's participation in various seminars and meetings outside the EP (36%). An equal number of publications (39%) contained information about important issues related to the European Union. Only 17% of the analysed texts concerned Polish politics, although this was, however, slightly higher than the number of posts devoted to EU institutions (16%). The texts aimed at informing citizens about EU institutions were most often about the EP, and much less frequently about the European Commission. Other institutions appeared in texts only sporadically. **In 2011, the Polish Presidency of the EU Council was mentioned in only six out of 307 analysed texts from that period.**

16 One text could be classified under several categories.

Links

An important indicator of what content is considered important to a given member of Parliament and to what issues he or she would like to attract the attention of readers, are links to particular pages, as the purpose of inserting a link is to encourage the reader to learn more about the subject. Links to the pages of EU institutions may therefore mean the conscious promotion of knowledge about those institutions. On the other hand, publishing the URLs of sites related to the election region of an MEP, ties him or her with the citizens of the area and shows that the MEP is not indifferent to their problems. **MEPs relatively seldom link their websites to the sites of EU institutions. The only exception here is the EP.**

Comparing the results of the analysis, it is evident that there is a group of MEPs placing links to a wide range of EU institutions on their sites, a group that only places a link to the EP and a group that refrains from placing any links at all.

Type of website		Number of linking MEPs
	European Parliament	43
	European Commission	19
	European External Action Service	2
	European Council	7
	EU-Council	9
	Polish Presidency	14
	European Central Bank	7
Polish national and regional institutions	For example: parliament, government, ministries	31
Local sites	For example: towns, regions	32
NGOs	Polish	25
	Foreign	3
Media	Polish	38
	Foreign	10
Personal sites		15

Table 3.
Number of MEPs placing links to other websites on their Internet site

One can find links to Polish state or local government institutions one can find links to Polish state or local government institutions on more than half of MEPs' websites (31). There is no doubt, however, that **the sites most often linked – after the EP site – are the sites of Polish media.** Paradoxically, from a website of a Polish MEP it is easier to get to

a site of a Polish private broadcaster than to the site of an EU Institution. MEPs quite often place links to local sites, for instance of certain towns (32), making it possible to go to the sites of local government offices and the media from their constituent regions.

Image of a Parliament member on the net

Parliament members are not the sole creators of their image on the net. It is the way in which politicians are presented by journalists that is decisive for the ultimate image of MEPs in the media, including the Internet. **Web portals¹⁷ write about MEPs usually in the context of domestic affairs (58%) and much less frequently in connection with the presence of Poland in the European Union (31%).** Least frequently, MEPs names appear on media portals in connection with the discussion of European affairs (9%). In those articles, the European Parliament theme appears only sporadically. This shows that even if MEPs try to raise European issues in their communications, the media – when writing about Polish MEPs – are more likely to focus on domestic matters.

The name of a politician can be used by a web portal for a variety of purposes. Sometimes he or she is quoted as an expert in the field to which a given text is devoted (12%), on other occasions, he or she is mentioned as an example of a person involved in a given issue (17%). On the portals, one can also find interviews with politicians (12%) and texts authored by them (6%).

On the other hand, when analysing other websites, listed by the Google search engine after typing in the name of a given MEP, one can clearly see that he or she appears much more often in a local context. **In the first one hundred hits that could be found for all MEPs under analysis and that could be grouped into certain categories, references to local sites definitively prevailed,** including media, offices or other sites containing a locality in their name. Other big groups were web portals and general media sites, while further down in the search results one could find the websites of the MEPs themselves, Wikipedia, YouTube and the domains where information had been placed during the election campaign.

17 The web portals onet.pl and gazeta.pl have been analysed.

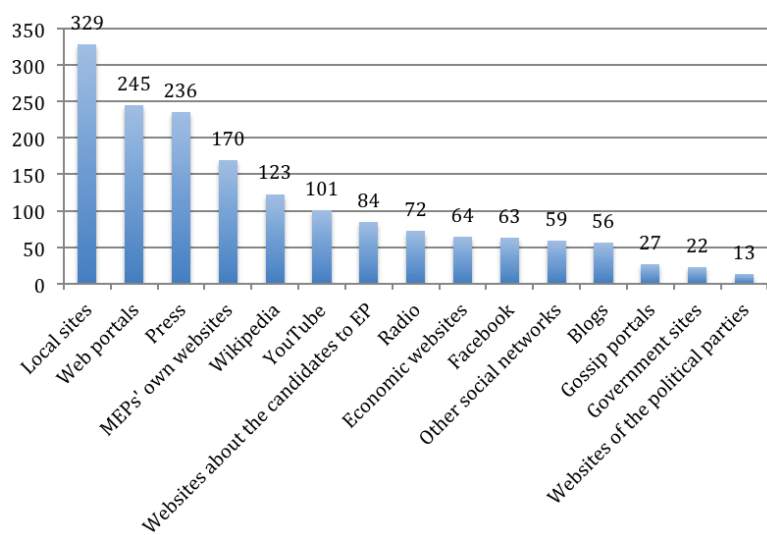


Diagram 1.
Total number of hits
for names of Polish MEPs
among the first one
hundred search listings
in the Google search
engine

SUMMARY

While the Internet communication of Polish Members of the European Parliament constitutes only a part of their activity in Europe, it is playing a more and more significant role – as is shown by the observation of the growing importance of electronic communication tools. The results of the analyses discussed in this publication indicate that **many Polish MEPs still do not fully use the potential of online tools which facilitate direct communication** especially with people interested in their activities and which offer the possibility to provide more comprehensive information about their dealings. On the other hand, **there is a group of MEPs who are becoming increasingly active in this area. MEPs most often use only the basic tools and functions, while only few of them have chosen to use Internet applications in a more sophisticated way.** This may be due to a **lack of knowledge and competence of the staff responsible for e-communication and/or a lack of confidence that this type of communication can be effective.** Some deputies still rely primarily on direct or traditional means of communication (participating in person in various events, the work of a regional office, contacts with the press, radio or television). Considering the general changes in communication, these MEPs will have to become more open to maintaining their presence on the net. At the same time, they will all have to make sure that this type of communication does not oversimplify the message they want and should address to the public.

IPA's publications on the subject:

- *Nie tylko polityka zagraniczna. Polacy w Parlamencie Europejskim na półmetku 7. kadencji*, ed. M. Szczepanik, J. Kucharczyk, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2012 [pl];
- A. Łada, M. Fałkowska-Warska, *Europoseł w sieci*, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2012 [pl];
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- J. Ćwiek-Karpowicz, P. Kaźmierkiewicz, M. Pucyk, *Polscy posłowie do Parlamentu Europejskiego. Aktywność i wpływ na krajową scenę polityczną / The work of Poland's Members of the European Parliament. Goals, achievements and recommendations for the future*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warszawa 2007 [pl, eng];



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